

## Chievres Library – Book Discussions & Book Club in a Box – 2007

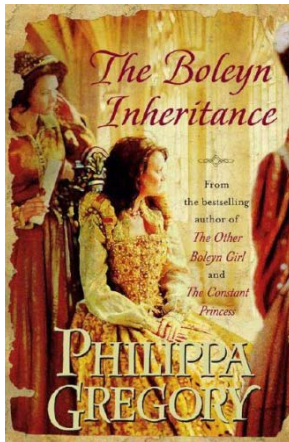
Chievres Library now hosts a "book club in a box" discussion series. Suggestions for future book discussions are welcome. We host a monthly discussion in the library, but you are also welcome to check out the kit for your own book discussion.

Using the Army Europe Libraries Book Club in a Box program as our guide, we now have local kits available for the following titles.

Kits will include:

- 1) 8-10 copies of the book
- 2) Biographical information about the author
- 3) Questions or topics to get the Book Club discussion started
- 4) Additional information about the book or subject of the book

Books for 2007 are:



### **The Boleyn Inheritance (Philippa Gregory) – April 2007**

From Publishers Weekly *Starred Review*. Returning to the scene of *The Other Boleyn Girl*, historical powerhouse Gregory again brings the women of Henry VIII's court vividly to life. Among the cast, who alternately narrate: Henry's fourth wife, Bavarian-born Anne of Cleves; his fifth wife, English teenager Katherine Howard; and Lady Rochford (Jane Boleyn), the jealous spouse whose testimony helped send her husband, Thomas, and sister-in-law Anne Boleyn to their execution. Attended by Lady Rochford, 24-year-old Anne of Cleves endures a disastrous first encounter with the twice-her-age king—an occasion where Henry takes notice of Katherine Howard. Gregory beautifully explains Anne of Cleves's decision to stay in England after her divorce, and offers contemporary descriptions of Lady Rochford's madness. While Gregory renders Lady Rochford

with great emotion, and Anne of Cleves with sympathy, her most captivating portrayal is Katherine, the clever yet naïve 16th-century adolescent counting her gowns and trinkets. Male characters are not nearly as endearing. Gregory's accounts of events are accurate enough to be persuasive, her characterizations modern enough to be convincing. Rich in intrigue and irony, this is a tale where readers will already know who was divorced, beheaded or survived, but will savor Gregory's sharp staging of how and why. (Dec. 5). © 2005 *The New Yorker*.

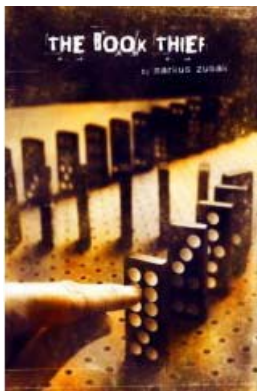


### **March (Geraldine Brooks) – May 2007**

From Publishers Weekly *Starred Review*. Brooks's luminous second novel, after 2001's acclaimed *Year of Wonders*, imagines the Civil War experiences of Mr. March, the absent father in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*. An idealistic Concord cleric, March becomes a Union chaplain and later finds himself assigned to be a teacher on a cotton plantation that employs freed slaves, or "contraband." His narrative begins with cheerful letters home, but March gradually reveals to the reader what he does not to his family: the cruelty and racism of Northern and Southern soldiers, the violence and suffering he is powerless to prevent and his reunion with Grace, a beautiful, educated slave whom he met years earlier as a Connecticut peddler to the plantations. In between, we learn of March's earlier life: his whirlwind courtship of quick-tempered Marmee, his friendship with Emerson and Thoreau and the surprising cause of his family's genteel poverty. When a Confederate attack on the contraband farm lands March in a

Washington hospital, sick with fever and guilt, the first-person narrative switches to Marmee, who describes a different version of the years past and an agonized reaction to the truth she uncovers about her husband's life. Brooks, who based the character of March on Alcott's transcendentalist father, Bronson, relies heavily on primary sources for both the Concord and wartime scenes; her characters speak with a convincing 19th-century formality, yet the narrative is always accessible. Through the shattered dreamer March, the passion and rage of Marmee and a host of achingly human minor characters, Brooks's affecting, beautifully written novel drives home the intimate horrors and ironies of the Civil War and the difficulty of living honestly with the knowledge of human suffering.

**\*\*\*\*THERE WILL BE NO BOOK DISCUSSION DURING THE SUMMER MONTHS - IT WILL RESUME AGAIN IN SEPTEMBER\*\*\*\***



### **The Book Thief (Markus Zusak) - September 2007**

From Booklist: Death is the narrator of this lengthy, powerful story of a town in Nazi Germany. He is a kindly, caring Death, overwhelmed by the souls he has to collect from people in the gas chambers, from soldiers on the battlefields, and from civilians killed in bombings. Death focuses on a young orphan, Liesl; her loving foster parents; the Jewish fugitive they are hiding; and a wild but gentle teen neighbor, Rudy, who defies the Hitler Youth and convinces Liesl to steal for fun. After Liesl learns to read, she steals books from everywhere. When she reads a book in the bomb shelter, even a Nazi woman is enthralled. Then the book thief writes her own story. There's too much commentary at the outset, and too much switching from past to present time, but as in Zusak's enthralling *I Am the Messenger* (2004), the

astonishing characters, drawn without sentimentality, will grab readers. More than the overt message about the power of words, it's Liesl's confrontation with horrifying cruelty and her discovery of kindness in unexpected places that tell the heartbreaking truth. *Hazel Rochman Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved.*

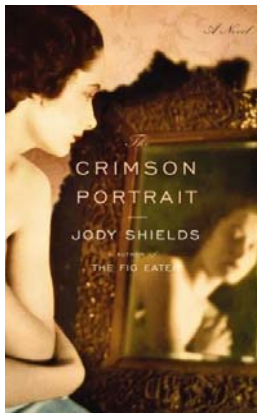


### **Snow Flower and the Secret Fan (Lisa See) - October 2007**

From Publishers Weekly Starred Review. See's engrossing novel set in remote 19th-century China details the deeply affecting story of lifelong, intimate friends (*laotong*, or "old sames") Lily and Snow Flower, their imprisonment by rigid codes of conduct for women and their betrayal by pride and love. While granting immediacy to Lily's voice, See (*Flower Net*) adroitly transmits historical background in graceful prose. Her in-depth research into women's ceremonies and duties in China's rural interior brings fascinating revelations about arranged marriages, women's inferior status in both their natal and married homes, and the Confucian proverbs and myriad superstitions that informed daily life. Beginning with a detailed and heartbreaking description of Lily and her sisters' foot binding ("Only through pain

will you have beauty. Only through suffering will you have peace"), the story widens to a vivid portrait of family and village life. Most impressive is See's incorporation of *nu shu*, a secret written phonetic code among women—here between Lily and Snow Flower—that dates back 1,000 years in the southwestern Hunan province ("My writing is soaked with the tears of my heart,/ An invisible rebellion that no man can see"). As both a suspenseful and poignant story and an absorbing historical chronicle, this novel has bestseller potential and should become a reading group favorite as well. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

From Booklist: Mystery writer See, author of *The Interior* (1999) and *Dragon Bones* (2003), takes readers to nineteenth-century China to explore a complex friendship between two women. Lily is the daughter of a farmer in Puwei Village, and Snow Flower is the daughter of a respectable family from Tongkou, and though the two girls have very different backgrounds, Madame Wang pairs the two as *laotong*, or "old sames," a bond that will last them a lifetime. The two begin to exchange messages in *nu shu*, a secret language known only to women. Their friendship is cemented during their youth and then put to the test when the girls prepare for marriage and Lily discovers a startling secret about Snow Flower's family. As Lily solidifies her place in her new family, Snow Flower suffers in her marriage, and the two grow apart as Lily's pride in her position swells. See's writing is intricate and graceful, and her attention to detail never wavers, making for a lush, involving reading experience. This beautiful tale should have wide appeal. *Kristine Huntley*  
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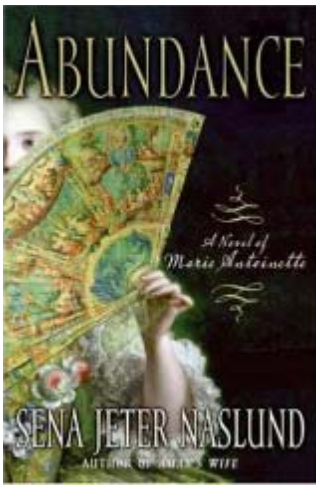


### **The Crimson Portrait (Jody Shields) - November 2007**

From Publishers Weekly: A majestic English estate sees new use as a makeshift hospital for WWI's wounded in Shields's beautifully haunting second novel. After losing her husband, Charles, in WWI, Catherine honors his wish to turn their home over to the army's medical unit, and it is soon filled with men wounded in combat, such as Julian, who, though half his face has been destroyed by shrapnel, reminds her of Charles. Dr. McCleary, who left retirement to work at the hospital, bonds with Julian while trying to keep Artis, an aspiring doctor and former groundskeeper, from being drafted. Also on staff is artist Anna Coleman, who sketches the wounded for medical records and lends her artistic talents to an undertaking proposed by Dr. McCleary: he wants to create a mask for a patient with an irreparably damaged face; Anna is to paint the soldier's pre-injury face on the mask. When that soldier turns out to be Julian, Catherine secretly embarks on a plan to resurrect her husband through her new lover. Shields's writing weaves dark mythical symbolism with matter-of-fact medical nitty-gritty to reveal what happens when class, ignorance, hopefulness and despair coalesce. (Dec.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

From Booklist: *\*Starred Review\** Catherine, a wealthy Brit, makes a promise to her husband as he leaves for the front during World War I. In the event of his death, she will allow their estate to be used as an army hospital. She grants his wish but is ill-prepared for the arrival of wounded soldiers with severely disfigured faces. She continues to live on the property, forming an uneasy alliance with the patients and medical staff who now occupy the first floor. As the days go by, Catherine becomes convinced her husband is alive--and wandering the grounds. Shields ( *The Fig Eater*, 2000) renders richly textured prose and a cast of vibrant characters led by head surgeon McCleary: "He wished for a perfection of skin for his patients. He imagined squares of skin the size of rose petals that would miraculously float down over the faces of the wounded men, and cover their wounds--thick, silent and painless as a snowfall." Equally intriguing are sketch artist Anna, who becomes part of a bold endeavor to create a new face for an injured soldier, and Catherine herself, who indulges her heart as the war draws closer to her door. Skillfully woven into Shields' haunting narrative are vivid--and at times, unsettling--descriptions of surgical procedures. A top-drawer literary thriller. *Allison Block*. Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved





## Abundance: A Novel of Marie Antoinette (Sena Jeter Naslund) - December 2007

From *Publishers Weekly*. **Starred Review.** The opening sentence of Naslund's fictional memoir of Marie Antoinette ("Like everyone, I am born naked") sets a hypnotically intimate tone that never wavers as the much-maligned Austrian princess recounts her life from baptism in the Rhine and rebirth as French citizen to appointment with the guillotine. In Naslund's (*Ahab's Wife*) sympathetic portrayal, 14-year-old "Toinette" arrives in France a pretty-mannered naïf determined to please the king, the court and, most importantly, her husband, the Dauphin. The novel provides a wealth of detail as Toinette savors the food, architecture, music and gardens of Versailles; indulges in hair and clothing rituals; gets acquainted with her indifferent partner and her scheming new relations; and experiences motherhood and loss. Her story unfolds

like classical tragedy—the outcome known, the account riveting—as famous incidents are reinterpreted (the affair of the necklace, the flight to Varennes), culminating in a heartbreaking description of the bloody head of the Princess de Lamballe held aloft on a pike for the deposed queen to see. With vivid detail and exquisite narrative technique, Naslund exemplifies the best of historical fiction, finding the woman beneath the pose, a queen facing history as it rises up against her. (*Oct.*) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

From Booklist: **\*Starred Review\*** The author of the ambitious *Ahab's Wife* (1999) has tackled another fictional challenge: the life of Marie Antoinette from her "birth as a citizen of France" at age 14 to her execution, told from her own point of view. But how to be true to what we know about the queen, who, though her reputation for cluelessness is not entirely deserved, was not exactly a powerhouse of intellect and insight; and at the same time make her interesting enough as a narrator to engage the reader for more than 500 pages? Naslund solves this problem by endowing Marie Antoinette with an artist's sensibility, and through her eyes the French court and its extraordinary artifice and luxury come alive. At the same time, this pampered queen is intensely human in her epistolary relationship with her overbearing mother, her less-than-satisfying marriage (unconsummated for seven years), her devotion to friends and family, and her tragic end. Adding to the complexity of the portrait is the way Naslund employs her setting. Carefully researched details about such things as the decor at Versailles lend verisimilitude but also often serve as symbolic motifs. The reputation of a queen once scorned for her frivolity has undergone a rehabilitation lately, exemplified by Antonia Fraser's *Marie Antoinette: A Journey* (2001), and Naslund's portrayal is firmly in that camp. Readers of serious historical fiction will revel in it. *Mary Ellen Quinn*. Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved

## Past Book Discussions:

September 2006:	<i>Cane River</i> - Lalita Tademy
October 2006:	<i>A Name of Her Own</i> - Jane Kirkpatrick
November/December 2006:	<i>Nine Parts of Desire</i> - Geraldine Brooks
	<i>Iran Awakening</i> - Shirin Ebadi
January 2007:	<i>Labyrinth</i> - Kate Mosse
February 2007:	<i>Sisters of the Sea</i> - Sandra Riley
March 2007:	<i>The Witch of Cologne</i> - Tobsha Learner